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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 000013

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: THAN SHWE AND KHIN NYUNT - A CONTRAST IN STYLE

Classified By: CDA, a.i Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.5(D).

[11.](#) (C) Summary: Prime Minister Khin Nyunt and Senior General Than Shwe hosted weekend functions involving Rangoon's diplomatic corps that illustrated the marked contrast in their styles. Khin Nyunt is engaging and polished, while Than Shwe is distant, grandiose, and strikes some observers as somewhat dazed. Despite these differences in style, both seem committed to the generals' continued control of Burma, either in uniform or in mufti. End Summary.

Khin Nyunt Woos Dip Corps...

[12.](#) (SBU) Apologizing to the heads of embassies and UN organizations for being largely inaccessible to them since becoming Prime Minister on August 25, General Khin Nyunt hosted a "Social Dinner" at a large GOB guesthouse January 2nd. On arrival he slowly made his way down the receiving line, smiling and chatting amicably with many along the way. He gave a speech in excellent English, reviewing the highlights of 2003 and pledging amity and prosperity for [2004](#). During dinner a band performed mostly western music while an army of waiters served the nine-course meal. At the evening's conclusion the Prime Minister (dressed in traditional Burmese garb) and Mrs. Khin Nyunt shook the hands of all departing guests and wished them a happy new year. Clearly General Khin Nyunt attempted to play the role of the charming host and gracious Prime Minister.

Than Shwe's Independence Day Celebration

[13.](#) (C) Senior General Than Shwe, in contrast, hosted a black tie affair January 4 to mark the 56th anniversary of Burma's independence from Britain. He arrived at the venue -- ironically, Burma's largely unused parliament building -- in a dress uniform featuring an assemblage of medals and decorations. Than Shwe was preceded down the receiving line by a tight phalanx of twenty one photographers who shot rolls of film during the four minute exercise. (Comment: why twenty one photographers in a country with a government-controlled press? Certainly one or two official photographers would have sufficed, unless the press gaggle was to glorify the spectacle of Than Shwe's entry.) Trailed by Prime Minister Khin Nyunt and Vice Senior General Maung Aye, the Senior General worked his way down the diplomatic receiving line, robotically shaking the hands of the assembled, often not even looking at them, let alone saying anything.

Is That Senior General Anawrahta or King Than Shwe?

[14.](#) (C) After the 400 guests had quickly wolfed down dinner, all moved into a large hall and were treated to a Myanmar Cultural Night. The evening's climax was a musical and dance tribute to King Anawrahta, the first unifier of the country. The Founder King was seen inspecting public works projects, paying homage to venerable monks, rallying the troops and citizenry, and building a stable and prosperous kingdom. At that point the dancers froze and a cinema-sized screen began showing heroic clips of General Than Shwe inspecting public works projects, making donations to monks, addressing huge outdoor USDA rallies, and winning the adulation of all. The blatant political crudeness of the "cultural show" caused some diplomats and UN officials new to Rangoon to gasp, then choke back snickers, although the more experienced knew this to be Than Shwe's standard fare.

[15.](#) (C) Comment: Khin Nyunt as polished politician versus Than Shwe as a Brezhnev-like dotard and buffoon are two superficial images probably reinforced among some who attended these two events. It does not automatically follow, however, that there is any real policy difference between them despite the vast difference in style and demeanor. Many diplomats charmed by Khin Nyunt's hospitality may be tempted to view him as a political "moderate," when the evidence seems to indicate he remains steadfastly committed to the generals' control of Burma. He may be keener than some, however, to have the generals' control continue in civilian attire, as opposed to Than Shwe's penchant for heavily bemedaled uniforms. End Comment.  
McMullen